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ABSTRACT

There is no easy way to get from research on teaching to teaching practice; moreover, trying to make teaching practices directly out of research can have destructive effects for teaching. Research can be extremely beneficial when results are linked with teachers' goals, and when teachers are aware that a specific occasion is appropriate for realization of the goal. This awareness enables them to engage in actions appropriate to fulfilling the goal. Research results can be brought to bear on teaching practices through careful, considered incorporation into the practical arguments in the minds of teachers. If research is presented to teachers in a manner that shows regard for their prior beliefs and experience, teachers will be encouraged to consider the research and its impact on practice. (CJB)

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# On Getting from Here (Research) to There (Practice)*

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Though it might seem simple, there is no easy way to get from research on teaching to teaching practices. William James said it nearly one hundred years ago:

> You make a great, a very great mistake, if you think that psychology, being the science of the mind's laws, is something from which you can deduce definite programmes and schemes and methods of instruction for immediate schoolroom use (James, 1892, 1958, p. 23).

True enough, modern research on teaching is not like the psychological research at the turn of the century. It typically takes place in school classrooms and is focused on practical problems of teaching. Still, it is research: controlled by prescribed methods, bound by carefully framed questions, and judged on criteria much different from those of the activity of teaching.

It isn't just that research on teaching and actual teaching are different, so you cannot squash the two together. It's also that you should not try to do it. Some people do try to squash them together, and having some limited success at it, declare that it can be done. But they violate countless rules of procedure when they do so (as I have tried to explain elsewhere; see Fenstermacher, 1979). Moreover, trying to make teaching practices directly out of research on teaching has some destructive effects for teaching itself. More on this point later.

If you cannot just leap from research on teaching to good teaching practice, does this mean that the research has no direct implications for teaching practices? No. There is a relationship between the two—a good, healthy relationship, if it is understood and properly used. In the first part of this paper, I will explain the relationship and try to show how it works.

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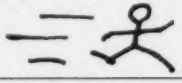
## Practical Arguments

Arguments, like people, come in all shapes and sizes, and forms. Most of the arguments with which we are familiar are in the form of intellectual or theoretical arguments. It is in this form that we debate nuclear disarmament, school attendance policies, or who should wash the dinner dishes. The conclusion to this form of argument is a statement of some kind, such as, "The U.S. should unilaterally reduce its nuclear arsenal," or, "Each member of the family shall take a turn doing the dinner dishes."

Practical argument is a different form. Its conclusion is not a statement of some kind, but an action. A very simple practical argument, adapted from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, appears below.

1 Health is a goal I seek
2 Jogging promotes health
3 Early morning is the best time for me to jog
4 It is early morning



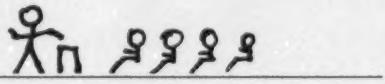
5 _____

There are probably some considerable differences between this practical argument and the arguments to which you are accustomed. One major difference, of course, is the last line in the argument. Note that it is an action, not a statement of some kind. Another difference is that the premises are not linked in the way one would expect, by tight logical conventions and linguistic rules. Yet the argument does seem to hang together, at least at an intuitive level. Consider this argument.

1 Cleanliness is a valued condition of life
2 This office is a mess
3 I have time to clean the office now

4 _____

I apologize for the bizarre stick figures. I hope they are adequate for you to get the point of practical argument. It is the way we reason about many things we undertake in everyday life. They almost always begin with some statement of a goal or desirable state of affairs, proceed through a set of conditions about the world or the situation before us, then acknowledge in some way that the time is right to act, and finally depict an action. These simple examples should convey the general idea. In order to grasp the bearing of practical arguments on teaching research, somewhat more complex examples are in order.

1 Children should learn as much as possible while in school
2 Children in my history class should learn as much history as possible while in my class
3 The most learning occurs when the learner's attention is clearly focused on academic tasks
4 Learning is focused by giving clear instructions, relevant assignments, ample practice, and extensive feedback
5 This is a history class
6 The children are present
7 

You cannot tell from the stick drawing that the teacher is doing what premise 4 states needs to be done: "giving clear instructions, relevant assignments, ample practice, and extensive feedback." Why is he doing so? The premise comes from recent research on teacher effectiveness, particularly from the results of the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (Denham & Lieberman, 1980; see also Berliner, 1979, and Brophy, 1983). My assumption is that the teacher has become familiar with this research and has incorporated it into a practical argument leading to the actions undertaken in the classroom.

Note that the teacher has adopted as a desirable goal that children learn as much as possible, particularly about history, while in his class. From this goal, the teacher seeks the means for realizing the goal. It is here that research can be extremely beneficial. From relevant research, we gain premises to incorporate into practical arguments governing classroom actions. By linking these research results with goal statements and awareness that the occasion is right for realization of the goal, the teacher engages in actions appropriate to fulfilling the goal.

Research on teaching can be valued for more than *supplying* premises that aid us in finding the means to realize instructional goals. In fact, it is more likely that most teachers come to the classroom already having practical arguments (though perhaps suppressed, or even compressed, as would be the case with maxims such as, "Don't smile until Christmas."). Teachers need help in moving beyond their prior premises.

The educational philosopher, Thomas Green, has worked out the nature of practical argument in the case of the teacher instructing a child. Note what he says, then we will transfer the context to the teaching of teachers.

> The competencies needed by a successful teacher in instruction are those needed to do whatever is required, within moral limits, to (1) change the truth value of the premises in the practical argument in the mind of the child, or to (2) complete those premises, or to (3) add to the range of premises accessible to the child in the formation of practical arguments (Green, 1976, p. 9).

If I understand Green correctly, he is arguing that the teacher tease out the practical argument that undergirds some action or another of the learner,

and then work with the child to scrutinize the premises in the argument, for the purpose of (1) changing their truth value, (2) completing ill-formed premises, or (3) supplying additional premises. The same activities may be performed with teachers, for they are learners when first introduced to recent research on teaching.

Note that several premises in the argument about learning in the history class are empirical premises, subject to verification by scientific inquiry. Such premises can be tested, and indeed many have been tested by the research on teaching and schooling. Using the results of this research, it is possible to change the truth values of prior premises (i.e., the evidence from research may show that a given premise, believed by the teacher to be true, is false), or the results may complete heretofore incomplete premises (as when the teacher states she is not sure about this, but "feels" it is the correct procedure), or add to the sophistication and soundness of the argument by supplying additional, empirically grounded premises.

In each case, the argument is changed. As the premises in the argument change, the action following from these premises is also likely to change. It is in this way that research results can be brought to bear on teaching practices—by careful, considered incorporation into the practical arguments in the minds of teachers. It is not an easy procedure, for it requires time, patience, and respect, just as does the teaching of children. Why, then, do it? This question leads us to the second half of the paper.

## Manner

Our manner is the way we act over time. We speak of persons being gentle, thoughtful, hateful, compassionate, or just. When we speak like this, we are describing the manner of these persons. Manner refers to traits of character, relatively stable dispositions to act in certain ways given specific circumstances. Thus we say of someone that he has a nice manner, a thoughtful manner, or a considerate manner.

Typically we learn manner by imitating the manner of others, at least at first. We become loving persons because others help us to grasp the value of love and show us how to act in loving ways. We begin to act as they act, because we are trained or encouraged to do so (as in the case of children) or because we choose to be like that (as in the case of older persons). As we practice acting according to a manner, we often adapt it to suit our own personality and circumstances, eventually making it uniquely our own. Then we become models for others, either by setting examples for them because they are young, or by being admired by them and having them choose to be something like us.

Much of what we think of as intellectual and educational virtues are matters of manner (even though we incorrectly identify them as skills; see Passmore, 1975, and Ryle, 1975). Being critical, reflective, deliberative, honest, humble, skeptical, analytical, reasonable, fair, truth-seeking—all these are manners. If the student is to learn them, he must have models.

Persons close to him must exhibit these manners, preferably in relation to the topics that engage student and teacher. If we seek students who are fair, honest, humble, truth-seeking, critical, etc., we must supply them with persons who already possess these manners, these traits of character. Hence, the task is to seek teachers who possess the manner needed to serve as models for the student, or enable teachers to acquire the appropriate manner by training and assisting them.

Each time teachers are taught, those who teach them exhibit manner. If the teacher approves or admires the manner, he or she may imitate it and later adapt it. The special responsibility of teachers of teachers is to possess and exhibit the manner most appropriate to education, to the proper learning of subjects and the acquisition of traits of character which are carefully reasoned and morally justified. Herein lies the reason I have described and explained practical arguments.

By introducing research on teaching to teachers through the analysis and transformation of their practical arguments, we exhibit a manner that shows regard for their prior beliefs and experience, that allows them to engage in their own deliberations about the adequacy of what they are learning and its impact on their actions, and that encourages them to act in the same way as they undertake the teaching of their own students. In other words, the teaching of teachers should serve as a model for how we hope teachers will instruct their students. The concept of practical argument offers a way for us to think about the use of teaching research so that in its presentation to teachers, we can preserve educative ideals, rational sensibilities, and personal autonomy.

I hope I have not sped through all this material at so great a pace that there is no hope you will follow my own intellectual (not practical) argument. If I have not, and have stated my thesis clearly, then you recognize that the idea of practical argument and the concept of manner are intimately linked. This link is a key to thinking how best to teach teachers about research on teaching.

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